King's killer axes deal that could free him

MEMPHIS — A prosecutor is floating the idea of James Earl Ray receiving a medical furlough if he admits he killed the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., but his attorney says that's out of the question.

The 70-year-old Ray, seriously ill with liver disease, was denied a furlough last year. But prosecutor John Campbell said yesterday that authorities may look at Ray differently this time if he "would admit the obvious . . . and quit spinning these crazy stories."

Ray defense attorney William Pepper said his client would do no such thing.

"James Earl Ray will never admit to a crime he didn't commit," Pepper said yesterday from his office in London.

Ray pleaded guilty in 1969 to killing King, who was shot to death in Memphis on April 4, 1968. He drew a 99-year prison sentence and has been trying to take back the guilty plea ever since. Ray says he was framed for the killing, though the gun prosecutors say was used to kill King was found at the scene with Ray's fingerprints on it.

Ray, suffering from cirrhosis of the liver and other problems, has been hospitalized repeatedly in the past 1½ years, most recently March 8. He slipped into a coma March 11, but has since regained consciousness, though his condition is still serious.

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